

small group training



1. Learn your audience

What you will be able to accomplish in each small group will vary. Watch for the signs and ask the questions—the answers will reveal a lot. For example, the group whose favorite movie is *Saw III* might think on a different level than the group whose favorite movie is *Happy Feet*.

SIGNS

- What are they interested in?
- When do they tune in?
- When do they seem disinterested?
- What's the weather outside?

QUESTIONS (There are books full of these)

- Gimme Five (favorite foods, things that make you cry, etc.)
- Choose Your Top 3 (fears, restaurants, etc.)
- Would You Rather . . . ? (be wealthy or well-known)
- Name Your Favorite (TV show, color, hero)
- If you could . . . ? (go anywhere, have a do over)
- Have you ever . . . ? (been in the ocean, told a lie and got busted)
- What if . . . ? (you had a million dollars, were terminally ill)

2. Find a connection point and relate it to the message

It could be sports, music, movies, fashion, game systems, etc.

- When it comes to football, what are some ways you show responsibility on and off the field?
- What will it take to accomplish your dream of become a fashion designer?
- How is life like a video game?
- Tell me about an actor/musician who is using his or her influence to make a difference in the world.

3. Let them hear their own voices by starting with a question everyone can answer

What was the highlight of your week?

4. Tell your story. I remember when I . . . (failed, lied, etc.)

Connect with their emotions. Realize that your vulnerability will create an environment where they feel safe to open up themselves. Remember that you “lead people with your strengths, but you connect with them through your weaknesses.” Obviously, choose appropriate levels of vulnerability with students.

5. Have them tell their stories

Have you ever had _____ happen to you? Tell me about it.

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6. Have them tell someone else's story

"Without naming names, do you know anyone who struggles with . . . ?"

7. "How did that make you feel?" or "Talk to me more about that . . . "

Have them elaborate by asking open-ended questions or asking them to expound upon an answer/story.

8. "What would happen if we all...?"

Dream and cast vision.

9. "On a scale of 1 to 10, where are you at when it comes to . . . ?"

In questions like this, it might be best for you to start.

10. Have them draw, illustrate, or express in an art form

For example, what do you want to be someday? Have them draw it and then explain it, or see if those around them can correctly guess what it is.

11. On occasion, purposefully create a discussion that makes it easy for everyone to honestly share "where they are at" in life and their journey with Christ.

The simple question, "Tell us something we could pray with you about this coming week that would really matter to you," is an effective door-opener for this kind of discussion.

12. Reiterate the one thing.

What is the one thing you want them to know and do?

13. Answer the unspoken question of "How does this relate to my life?"

Make sure that part of the discussion, usually the conclusion, clearly answers that question.

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1. The Object.

Whoever has the ball, pen, etc. is the one who can talk.

2. The Touch.

Even though the shy person will want to sit next to you, put the hyper or excessively talkative student there. When they begin to get out of control, gently put your hand on his or her back. Often, that's enough to pull them back in.

3. The Leader.

Let the students rotate through reading the questions.

4. The Pause.

Often students can sense when they've crossed the line. By saying, "I can wait" in a calm voice, followed by a dead silence, you will get their attention.

5. The Conversation.

Don't hesitate to pull aside an excessive talker before or after the group, telling him or her, "I so much value your thoughts, but I want to make sure that everyone in the group gets a chance to share. It would be great if you could participate, but try to limit your comments, and maybe even use your giftedness to help me gently pull some of the other students into our discussion."

6. The Incentive.

Candy for answering the first few questions, play a game after you work through the discussion guide, etc.

7. The Move.

When you just can't handle it and you've tried everything else, chances are it's time to move that student out of the group a few feet away until he or she feels they are ready to rejoin the group and behave. If that fails, the student may need to be moved to a different group away from their friends. Worse case scenario—one of the paid staff will give the student a week off to think about whether he or she really wants to be there.

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The maturity level of students can be all over the chart. Decide ahead of time what you think a “win” might look like for your group. Remember, the discussion guide you’ve been given is merely a guide.

1. You can write your own questions during the teach time, video, etc.

2. You have the freedom to go off on an appropriate tangent.

The key word is “appropriate”. For example, if a student’s dad died that week, diverging from the topic is totally acceptable. However, avoid the temptation to “chase rabbits” in your discussion, no matter how awesome the “rabbits” might appear.

3. Remember that you don’t always have to arrive at one final answer.

4. Turn the focus of their eyes on to an object.

Sometimes it’s easier to talk when your eyes are off each other and looking at something else—maybe a picture, graph, ball, etc.

5. At times, it helps to go for a walk, change the scenery, use the senses, etc.

6. Don’t fear the awkward silence.

7. Lean in, look them in the eye, show that you care, and that you are listening.

Affirm responses. Use words like, “That’s a good comment, Justin.” Be fair and Christ-honoring to all students. Correct and redirect when necessary. Remember what they said and use it in subsequent conversations.

8. They just want to know you care.

You don’t have to have all the right answers, nor are they necessarily looking for you to fix their problems.

9. Teach them to pray.

Popcorn prayer, one sentence prayers, prayer volunteers, prayer journals—mix it up.